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If Millions for Contras Fail to Buy Victory, What Next?

By CARLOS TUNNERMANN

The U.S.-backed mercenary war against Nicaragua has demonstrated one thing with certainty during the past four years: the contras cannot and will not overthrow the elected government.

Nicaraguan military victories in the field this past year have robbed the terrorist group of any effective offensive capability. Our army has largely cleared our economically important coffee slopes of serious contra-threats. Our southern borders are at peace and more secure. Large number of Miskitos who were caught up in the CIA-promoted war against Nicaragua have now set aside the armed approach and are participating in the development of the regional autonomy law, promoted by the government in response to the genuine aspirations of all the peoples of our Atlantic coast.

The contras may sporadically penetrate our northern border to carry out terrorist raids against civilians in remote areas, but the main force will remain inside Honduran territory, creating serious problems for the people of that country.

Several key U.S. military officials have expressed skepticism about the contras' chances for success. Upon retiring, Gen. John Gorman, formerly head of the Southern Command, said that the contras would not be able to win in the foreseeable future. His successor, Gen. Wallace Nutting, has voiced similar views.

Consider the situation: Although the contras have received more than \$100 million from the United States in CIA-administered military aid since 1981, and part of \$27 million in "humanitarian aid" since last September, they have never held a single town in Nicaragua, nor have they won any popular support. This is because our people know that these mercenaries doing the bidding of the U.S. Administration are led by former Somoza National Guard officers, and they are determined that these individuals, who for so many years committed the most atrocious crimes against innocent civilians, never return to power in Nicaragua.

Consistent with their past history, the contras have used U.S. tax dollars to terrorize our nation by killing 3,652 persons, 146 of whom were women and 210 children under 12 years of age. The contras have wounded more than 4,000 and kidnapped 5,232. More than 240,000 Nicaraguans have lost their homes, and 7,582 children are war orphans.

How the U.S. Government can rightfully condemn acts of terrorism elsewhere and still support the killing and maiming of our people we cannot understand.

Lately, their lack of success has made the contras desperate. An indication of this was their use of the deadly surface-to-air missile to shoot down a Nicaraguan helicopter in December. This action, which is without precedent in Central America, represents not only a serious escalation in the quality of armaments, but also poses a threat to all civil aviation in the region.

The failure and obvious deterioration of the contras as a viable military force notwithstanding, the U.S. Administration is about to seek congressional approval of military aid. This could have serious consequences, not only for Nicaraguans or Central Americans as has been the case so far, but for North Americans as well.

Suppose Congress approves more aid for the contras. If that does not alter the situation—as we believe will be the case—what are the U.S. options then? Air support? Invasion?

Each escalation toward a military option reduces the possibility of a negotiated solution, and leaves the door open to ultimate military solution—direct U.S. combat action in Nicaragua.

The situation must not be allowed to deteriorate to such a dangerous point, especially since there is a viable alternative readily available.

Two weeks ago the countries involved in the Contadora peace process, and their support group, once again called on the United States to end all aid to the contras and to resume the bilateral talks with Nicaragua that were suspended by the U.S. Administration last January.

Nicaragua welcomes and supports this call for peaceful negotiations made by the eight largest countries in Latin America, and, in the interest of peace that our two peoples deeply desire, calls on the government of the United States to do the same.

Approval of any aid to the contras, whether it is called "humanitarian" or military, would be tantamount to a slap in the face of these eight Latin American democracies, whose call is motivated only by their profound desire to avoid war and to promote peace based on respect for independence, self-determination and rule of law.

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